

COLLECTING NOTES 1989

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ON 21st MAY we arrived *en famille* on the Isle of Mull. Primarily, the visit was to see Boyd Barr and drink all his whisky — an impossible task as any fellow collector who has shared Boyd's hospitality will readily confirm! Sunny, clear weather prevailed for the week, but clear skies and cold northerly winds badly affected moth trapping. Interesting species in the trap included *Cyclophora albipuncta* Hufn., *Nebula salicata latentaria* Curt., *Odontosia carmelita* Esp., and *Papestra biren* Goeze. From a female *biren* I later reared a number of pupae. Against my better judgement, I allowed Boyd to persuade me to ascend the cliffs at Calgary Bay to search for larvae of *Zygaena purpuralis caledonensis* Reiss. This death-defying madness resulted in just two larvae! Most had already pupated.

We left Mull for Perth on 27th May, arriving at Almond Bank in the late afternoon. Cool nights again depressed the number of moths taken but I was pleased to find *Peridea anceps* Goeze. Many specimens of *Spilosoma lubricipeda* L. came to light and most of these had some degree of ochreous background coloration on the forewings. I retained a female in the hope that a little inbreeding would produce some interesting forms. How I regret that decision. As I write (mid November) I am desperately trying to keep pace with the greed of F3 larvae. About 10% of the F2 pupae decided to hatch (and pair) despite being kept in an unheated and unlit cellar. My garden has never been so devoid of dandelions, docks and sow thistles! Needless to say, only very typical *lubricipeda* have appeared so far.

On 22nd June we drove to Flamborough on the Yorkshire coast. On the cliffs below the lighthouse I noticed a number of Zygaenid cocoons and a few freshly-emerged specimens of *Zygaena filipendulae stephensi* Dup. Oddly enough, all the cocoons I collected produced only *Z. lonicerae latomarginata* Tutt. On the basis of large size, these north-eastern *lonicerae* were at one time distinguished as a subspecies. The cocoons I collected did produce a few large specimens but on average the moths were a little smaller than those hatched from wild collected Staffordshire cocoons.

I will not bore readers with an account of the butterflies noted in France during the first two weeks of July. However, I will bore you with a few notes about the moths! The tiny hamlet of Le Rousell, near le Buisson in Perigord is probably the only settlement of its kind in France to have introduced mercury vapour street lighting. Despite this unhelpful background, my tiny actinic tube attracted a steady stream of moths with names to delight the British collector. Perhaps *Thalera fimbrialis* Scop., *Cyclophora pupillaria* Hb., *Hecatera dysodea* D. & S., *Acrionicta auricoma* D. & S., and *Emmelia trabealis* Scop. will serve to illustrate my point. Other visitors to the actinic included the "Rhino beetle" *Oryctes*

nasicornis F. and Mantis Fly (*Mantispa* sp.) which looks like a small mantis but is actually a type of lacewing.

I was very pleased to take a fresh female specimen of *Harpyia milhauseri* F. known in Britain as the Tawny Prominent from a single specimen taken in Sussex in 1966. Fortunately, I resisted the killing jar and I now have a number of *milhauseri* cocoons overwintering in my shed. The fully grown larva displays the typical prominent shape and is a fine sight in green and beige which exactly match the colours of the summer flush of oak leaves. The larval "prominence" is bright blue. The larvae have an unfortunate habit of biting large holes in nylon netting. The reason for this eludes me for they make no attempt to escape via the holes. Indeed the larvae are very loath to leave the oak twigs until pupation time arrives. The cocoon is hard and resembles a miniature version of that of *Cerura vinula* L. when firmly anchored to a twig or the wooden elements of the cage. Two small males emerged prematurely in early October.

Following a successful trip to South Wales in mid September to look for larvae of *Eurodryas aurinia* Rott. I returned to Bigbury in south Devon for the first week of October. Migrant moths taken included *Heliothis armigera* Hb., *Mythimna vitellina* Hb. and *M. unipuncta* Haw. Resident species included *M. l-album* L., *Lithophane leautieri hesperica* Bours. and *Eumichtis lichenea* Hb. 1989 saw only two species added to my garden list for Blackwell in north Worcestershire. These were *Euphyia unangulata* Haw. and *Nonagria typhae* Thunb. A pleasant development in early October was the appearance in the garden of five specimens of *L. leautieri*. I had only recorded one previous specimen in 1985 and hopefully the moth is now firmly established.

Abundance of *Aporophyla nigra* (Haworth) (Lep.: Noctuidae) in Oxfordshire

Every year in September and October small numbers (up to four a night) of the black rustic, *Aporophyla nigra*, appear in the mv or black light trap in my garden at the address below. However, in 1989 an opportunity arose of operating an mv trap in farmland at Long Wittenham, Oxfordshire. The first *A. nigra* appeared on 31st August and thereafter numbers increased reaching 85 on 23rd September, 137 on 24th September and a peak of 200 on 25th September. There was then a steady decline, although 27 were counted on 23rd October with the last on 25th October when there were six. During 19 nights of trapping at this site in September and October 1989 a total of 740 was counted, making it one of the commonest autumn moths.

The species is undoubtedly on the increase in many areas, but whether the high numbers found at Long Wittenham represent recent successful adjustment to modern farming or whether 1989 was simply a good year cannot yet be stated.— DENIS F. OWEN, 2 Shelford Place, Headington, Oxford.